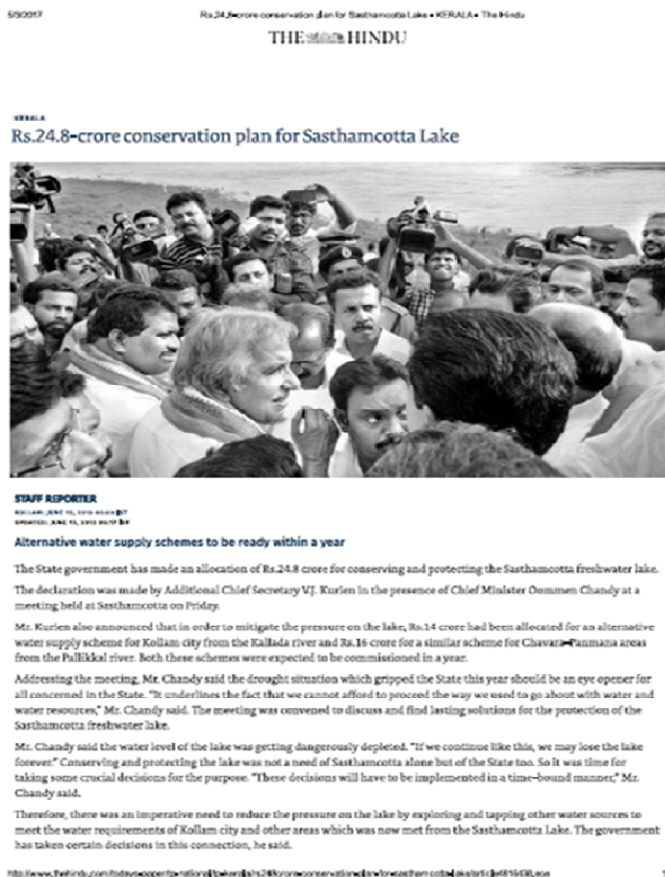


Tears for a once-large lake

To rephrase former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, our public plan implementations are a mockery wrapped in sham, inside a farce. Sasthamkotta Lake, the state's largest freshwater lake and one of the 26 Ramsar sites in the country, in Kollam district is a wasteland today.

A Ramsar site is UN-speak for an internationally designated wetland site that should be conserved and sustainably developed and used. The deterioration that the lake has faced is the opposite of what should happen at a Ramsar site and the issue has been raised continually by local people and environmental groups.



It looked like a real difference could be made when Oommen Chandy's UDF government allocated Rs 24.8 crore for conservation and protection of the Sasthamkotta freshwater lake. Together with this, another over Rs 30 crore was allocated for the water needs of Kollam via Kallada river and Pallikal river. This was in June 2013.

Things changed, but for the worse. The largest freshwater lake continued to shrink and encroachers are taking over the land that lies bare. The lakes natural aquifers are blocked with waste. So, our politicians have stepped in again with what they feel is the best remedy under the circumstances: forming a committee.

The LDF government constituted an expert committee, who are expected to prepare a management action plan for the conservation and protection of the Lake. According a report in The Hindu (April 19), the new committee comprises 'experts and bureaucrats

connected with the subject' and 12 special invitees, who are bureaucrats from various departments.

Apparently, an action plan will be submitted at the earliest. It is convenient that the committee, which sounds like an old boys' club, has not strained itself and set a concrete deadline. 'At the earliest' in bureaucratic language translates to 'if it happens, it happens'.

Plans are aplenty and political chamchas are there on both ends, but Sasthamcotta lake has deteriorated and is almost close to being extinct. After all what is needed, it's a lake, protection and conservation measures have to kick start, not this STP (Sewage Treatment Plant) based construction to loot the public further. Governments and political dispensation has to get out of

implementation and concentrate on the policy space and focus on getting the implementation done with great accountability.

But implementation, accountability, and the administration are not always mutually exclusive entities. Budhanur grama panchayat in Alapuzha district set a shining example when it spend Rs 1 crore through the MNREGA scheme in January, and with the participation of 700 local men and women cleaned up and revived the dead Kuttamperoor River in 70 days.

Can we hope to have the same sweet dreams for Sashthamkotta Lake?

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Panel to prepare lake management plan

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
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Environmental degradation of Sashthamkotta Lake

The State government has constituted an expert committee for the preparation of a management action plan for the conservation and protection of the freshwater Sashthamkotta Lake in Kollam district which is fast sinking mainly because of environmental degradation caused by human intervention.

This is the first time that a government constituted a committee for the protection of the lake devoid of representatives from political parties.

The new committee comprises experts and bureaucrats connected with the subject.

Members

The committee is being headed by M. Vishwanathan, the government nominee to the District Planning Council; K.C. Prasad, secretary of the district panchayat; R. Manilal, district planning officer; S. Jamal, member of the State Resource Group; K. Soman, senior scientist attached to the Centre for Earth Science Studies; V.K. Madhusoodhanan, environmental activist who had conducted several studies on the Sashthamkotta lake; Ramanujan Murthy, expert on wetland conservation; and V.R. Prathibha from the Peoples Planning Board.

The new committee also has 12 special invitees, all of them bureaucrats from various departments. The committee will prepare and submit the action plan at the earliest.

